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ABSTRACT

Rutgers University's response to a serious decline in the number of minority students enrolled at the undergraduate level is discussed, with attention to the background to the problem, the data employed to clarify the scope of the problem, and change strategies. Admissions and enrollment statistics in the first semesters after implementation of some of the strategies are briefly considered. Data are included on: trends in total and black applications, admissions, and enrollments, 1980-1985; one-year attrition rates in total and black freshmen entering three colleges within the university, 1979-1984; the four, five, and six year graduation rates for students entering the three colleges in 1979 and 1980; and enrollment status (percent enrolled, percent not enrolled, and percent graduated) for total and black students 1979-1984 after 1-6 years. Strategies to improve admissions yield included special mailings to minority students, telephone contacts, personal invitations to campus receptions, a scholarship program for high ability Black and Puerto Rican students, and a seminar for minority high school students and their counselors. Many of the retention efforts centered around increased tutorial assistance and additional counseling. (SW)

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Institutional Responses to Declining Minority Enrollment

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Abstract

Faced with the prospect of ever-declining Black enrollments, Rutgers University undertook first to study recent trends in admissions and retention at the University, and second to develop strategies to improve both admissions "yield" and retention rate. Each of the undergraduate colleges received a "basic facts statement" documenting declines in admissions and retention for Black applicants. Strategies to improve recruitment included new scholarship programs and summer programs designed to develop academic skills. Retention strategies included programs to identify and counsel high-risk students and to provide additional tutorial and educational resources. Early indications are that applications from and offers of admission to Black students are higher, but yield has not changed. One and two-year attrition rates for Black students have decreased.

Institutional Responses to Declining Minority Enrollment

The purpose of this report is to discuss one institution's attempts to address the problem of a serious decline in the number of minority students enrolled at the undergraduate level. The report describes the background of the problem, the data used to understand its scope, and various strategies to combat it. The report concludes with a brief follow-up look at admissions and enrollment statistics in the first semesters after implementation of some of the strategies.

Background

Between fall 1979 and fall 1984, Rutgers University experienced a decline of approximately 17% in the undergraduate enrollment of Black students, while total enrollment fell only 3%. The fact that declines of similar magnitude were occurring throughout American higher education was of little consolation, and thus, in the spring of 1985, a University-wide Select Committee was appointed to examine the possible causes for the decline in Black undergraduate enrollments and to suggest steps the University might take to reverse the trend.

When the Committee met to consider the problem, it became apparent that the first need was for better information about enrollment, attrition rates, and graduation rates throughout the University. Careful consideration of basic University-wide data led the Committee to conclude that the problem of declining Black enrollments must be addressed in two ways: 1) by aggressively seeking to improve the University's enrollment "yield" of able Black applicants; and 2) by reducing the attrition rates of all students who are admitted to the University. Though both of these approaches to increasing Black enrollments were regarded as extremely important, the Committee's emphasis clearly centered on student retention.

In the fall of 1985, meetings were scheduled with the Dean and several other key staff members in twelve undergraduate colleges. The purposes of these meetings were: 1) to share with the Dean and staff of each college basic admissions and retention information, particularly as it pertained to Black students; 2) to convey the message that the University was very concerned about the declining enrollments of Black students and aggressively intent upon changing that trend; and 3) to invite each college Dean to submit a plan that would indicate how that particular college would address the problem. The Office of Institutional Research was called upon to prepare a "basic facts statement" for each undergraduate college summarizing information about applications, admissions, enrollments, attrition, graduation rates, and correlates of student performance. Though such summary statements included information for all students within each college, the emphasis was on Black students.

Describing the Problem

Rutgers University was founded in 1766, making it the eighth oldest institution of higher learning in the country. In 1864 it became New Jersey's land-grant college, and was designated "the State University of New Jersey" in 1945. The University incorporates 13 undergraduate schools and colleges located on three campuses. Three of the undergraduate colleges are evening schools geared toward adult students. The other ten include the Colleges of Engineering, Nursing, and Pharmacy, and the Mason Gross School of the Arts, as well as six offering arts and sciences degrees. The units located in Newark and Camden are primarily commuter schools, although a small amount of undergraduate housing was opened in

both cities in the past year. Douglass College enrolls women only. Rutgers College enrolls more than twice as many students as any other undergraduate unit.

Because all the undergraduate colleges at Rutgers University have unique histories and therefore different enrollment problems, it is not always meaningful to present statistics for Rutgers University in its entirety. This discussion will, therefore, focus on three of the undergraduate day colleges, designated Colleges A, B, and C. College A is located in New Brunswick and enrolls approximately 500 freshmen each year, of whom 6-7% are Black. In 1981 it became a semi-professional school, with an emphasis on environmental and agricultural sciences. College B is also in the New Brunswick area, and enrolls 650-700 freshmen each year, of whom about 19% are Black. College C is basically a commuter college in an urban setting, and enrolls about 600 freshmen yearly, of whom 11-12% are Black.

The first section of the "basic facts statement" considered recent admissions history. Table 1 presents trends in total and Black applications, admissions, and enrollments since 1980. College A has been

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Insert Table 1 about here

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experiencing a continuous decrease in applications since 1980: total applications declined by almost one-third between 1980 and 1985, while applications from Black students declined by 42%. The percentage of all students admitted rose over the same period, but there was no perceptible trend in total yield (number enrolled divided by number admitted), and the

Table 1: Trends in Applications, Admissions, and Enrollments 1980-1985, Black and Total

	BLACK						TOTAL					
	APPS	ADMIT		ENROLL			APPS	ADMIT		ENROLL		
	N	N	% [a]	N	% [b]		N	N	% [a]	N	% [b]	
COLLEGE A												
1980	423	211	(50)	50	(24)		5473	2101	(38)	518	(25)	
1981	464	266	(57)	62	(23)		6057	2740	(45)	592	(22)	
1982	343	195	(57)	45	(23)		4704	2595	(55)	671	(26)	
1983	347	209	(60)	39	(19)		4616	2351	(51)	478	(20)	
1984	298	175	(59)	46	(26)		3996	2320	(58)	532	(23)	
1985	246	146	(59)	28	(19)		3710	2210	(60)	539	(24)	
COLLEGE B												
1980	960	469	(49)	148	(32)		4326	2592	(60)	613	(24)	
1981	970	528	(54)	157	(30)		4824	3136	(65)	829	(26)	
1982	1007	505	(50)	130	(26)		6271	3400	(54)	733	(22)	
1983	933	511	(55)	148	(29)		6985	3781	(54)	718	(19)	
1984	987	463	(47)	129	(28)		7425	3927	(53)	655	(17)	
1985	905	497	(55)	113	(23)		7193	4057	(56)	656	(16)	
COLLEGE C												
1980	691	223	(32)	106	(48)		3507	1755	(50)	716	(41)	
1981	629	184	(29)	89	(48)		3211	1609	(50)	655	(41)	
1982	513	169	(33)	81	(48)		2917	1513	(52)	614	(41)	
1983	512	164	(32)	63	(38)		3149	1624	(52)	568	(35)	
1984	508	188	(37)	98	(52)		3147	1705	(54)	758	(44)	
1985	451	148	(33)	68	(46)		2987	1600	(54)	631	(39)	

(a) Number of admits divided by the number of applications.
(b) Number of enrolls divided by number of admits.
Often referred to as admissions "yield."

yield for Black students declined considerably (with the exception of 1984). In consequence, where Blacks represented about 10% of the 1980 freshman cohort, they were only 5% of the 1985 group.

At College B, in contrast, total applications rose dramatically (by 66%), but Black applications were down. Total percent admitted declined, but Black admits increased. Yield was lower for both the total cohort and for Blacks separately, and Blacks represented 17% of the 1985 cohort, compared to 24% in 1980. College C showed a 15% decline in total applications from 1980 to 1985, but a 35% decline for Blacks. In 1985 11% of the freshmen were Black, compared to 15% in 1980.

Attrition and graduation data were especially revealing. Total first-year attrition was high for the 1979-1981 cohorts, and then declined dramatically. Four-year graduation rates also declined for the 1979-1981 cohorts. For Black students, however, the University-wide one-year attrition rate was 4% higher in 1980 than in 1979 and held steady for the next four years. The four-year Black graduation rate went from 25% for the 1979 cohort to 16% for the 1981 group.

Figure 1 shows the one-year attrition rate for total and Black freshmen at Colleges A, B, and C. At College A, total one-year attrition has been consistently low, but the one-year attrition for Blacks quintupled between 1980 and 1983, before falling off for the 1984 cohort. At College

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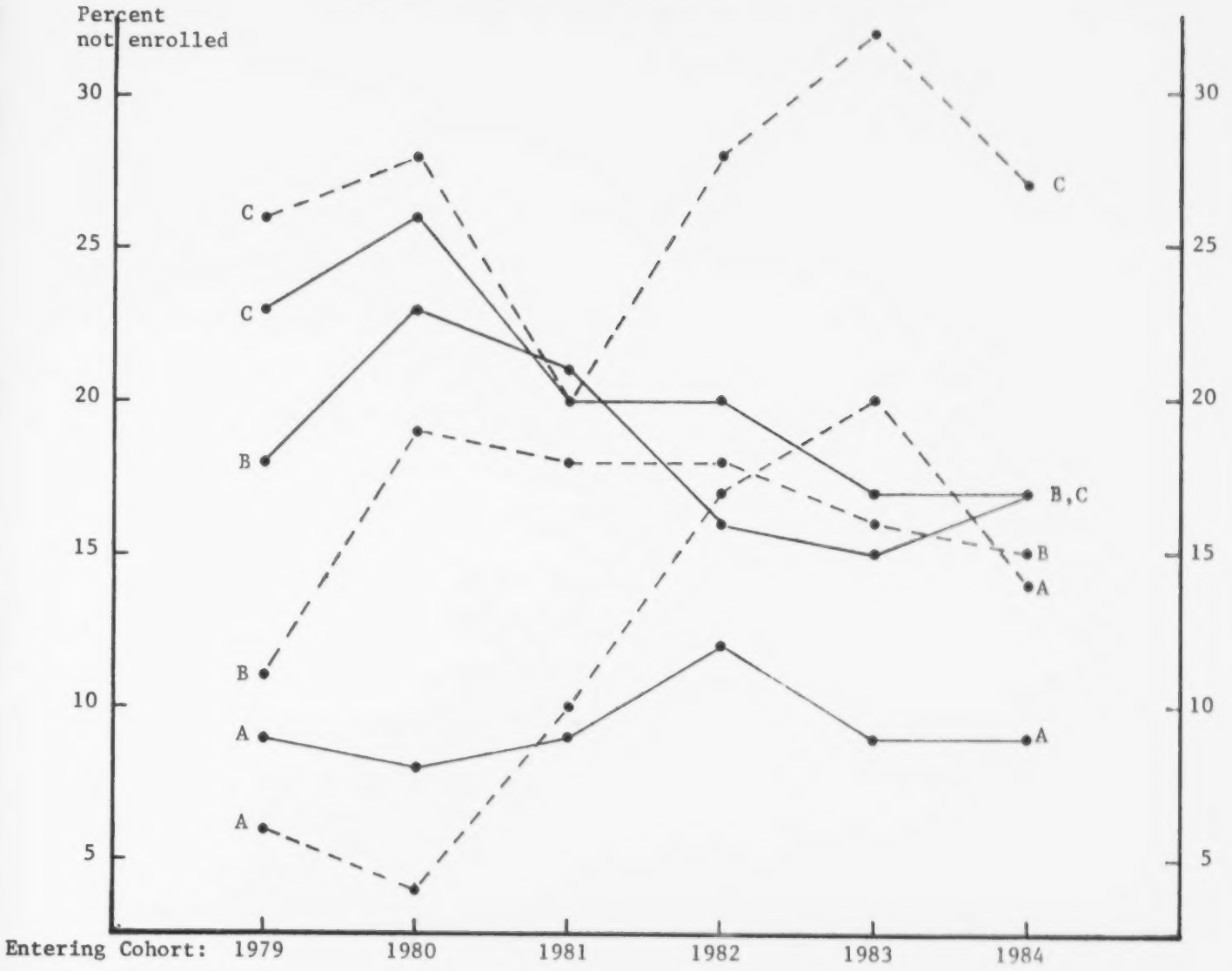
Insert Figure 1 about here

B, the Black one-year attrition rate was lower than the total rate for four of the six cohorts. At College C, as at A, one-year attrition for Blacks

Figure 1: One-year Attrition Rates, Total and Black Freshmen Entering Colleges A, B, and C 1979-1984



increased at the same time as it decreased for the total freshman cohort in 1982 and 1983, but declined again for students entering in 1984.

Figure 2 shows the four, five, and six-year graduation rates for students entering the three colleges in 1979 and 1980. This figure clearly illustrates 1) the differences between total and Black graduation rates; 2) the decline in graduation rates between the 1979 and 1980 cohorts; and 3) the relatively large percentage of students who take more than four years to graduate.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Table 2 shows a cohort-by-year enrollment matrix for total and Black students at College A. These matrices were considered the most valuable

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Insert Table 2 about here

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data presentations for the colleges, as they permitted both trend analysis (by reading across the rows) and cohort analyses (reading down the columns). The remainder of the information sent to the Deans consisted of a brief analysis of attrition and graduation rates categorized by SAT scores, high school rank in class, gender, and Educational Opportunity Fund participation. Students with higher test scores and class ranks showed higher graduation rates, as did women and non-EOF students. White students were much more likely to leave the University in good standing (with a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher) than were Black students.

Figure 2: Four, Five, and Six Year Graduation Rates
1979 and 1980 Total and Black Freshmen
Colleges A, B, and C

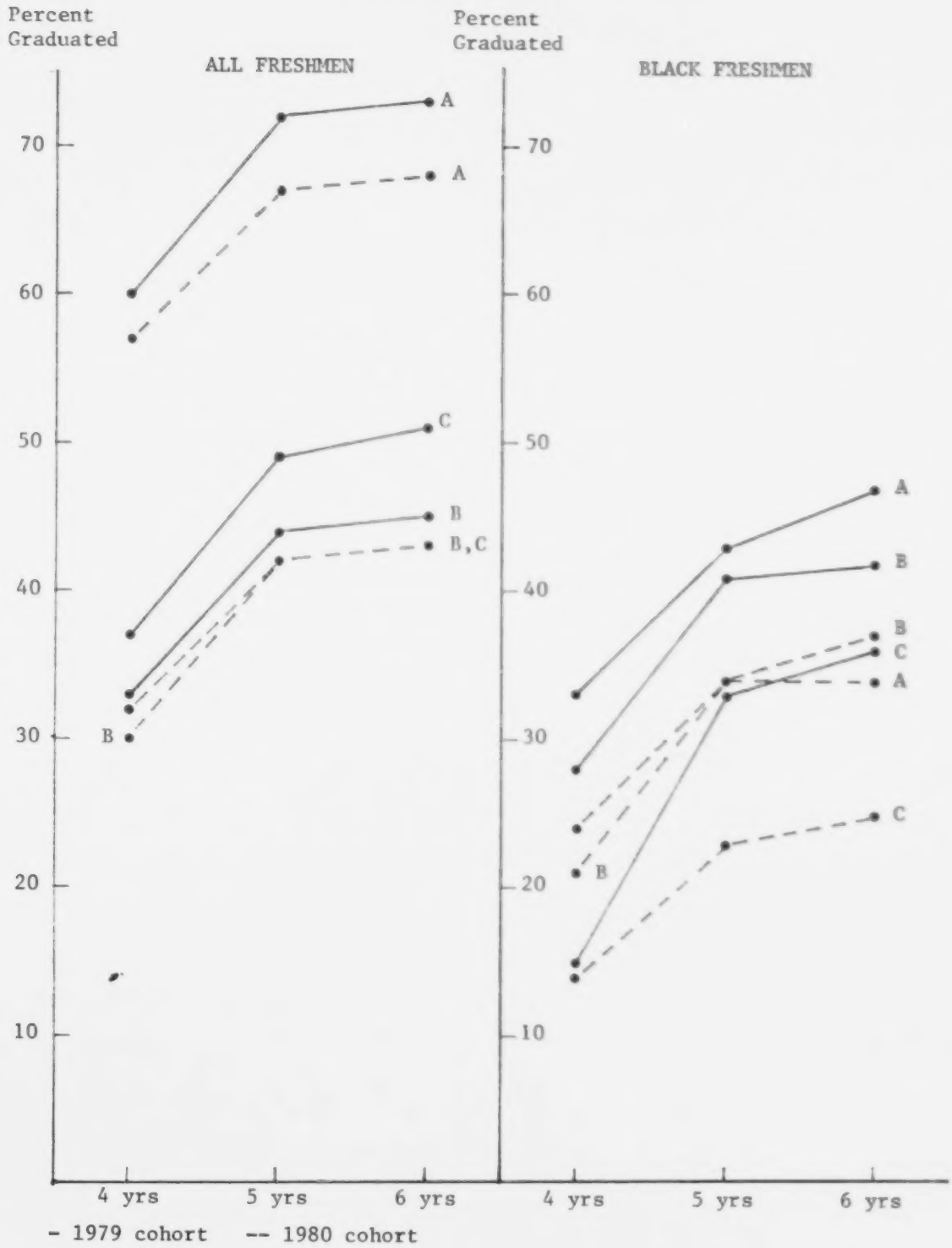

Table 2: Enrollment Status by Cohort and Year: College A

	1979		1980		1981		1982		1983		1984	
	Total	Black	Total	Black	Total	Black	Total	Black	Total	Black	Total	Black
(N)	(658)	(51)	(522)	(50)	(590)	(61)	(672)	(46)	(481)	(40)	(508)	(44)
STATUS												
AFTER 1 YEAR												
% ENROLLED	91	94	92	96	91	90	88	83	91	80	91	86
% NOT ENROLLED	9	6	8	4	9	10	12	17	9	20	9	14
% GRADUATED	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
AFTER 2 YEARS												
% ENROLLED	83	82	82	80	84	72	80	74	87	65		
% NOT ENROLLED	17	18	18	20	16	28	20	26	13	35		
% GRADUATED	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—		
AFTER 3 YEARS												
% ENROLLED	80	76	79	70	79	67	76	63				
% NOT ENROLLED	20	24	20	28	20	33	23	37				
% GRADUATED	0	—	1	2	1	—	1	—				
AFTER 4 YEARS												
% ENROLLED	17	33	19	38	20	30						
% NOT ENROLLED	23	33	24	38	28	52						
% GRADUATED	60	33	57	24	52	18						
AFTER 5 YEARS												
% ENROLLED	5	14	4	10								
% NOT ENROLLED	24	43	28	56								
% GRADUATED	72	43	67	34								
AFTER 6 YEARS												
% ENROLLED	3	8										
% NOT ENROLLED	25	45										
% GRADUATED	73	47										

Strategies to Improve Admissions Yield

Once the colleges had the data defining their particular admissions and retention problems, it was up to them to develop strategies and programs to combat the decline in Black enrollments. Some special funds were made available to the colleges in support of post-admission recruitment efforts designed to increase admissions yield. Such efforts included increased correspondence, telephone contacts, personal invitations to campus receptions, and occasional visits to students' homes.

For its part, the Admissions Office sent nearly 9000 special mailings to minority students in 1985-86, held "college days" across the State, and sponsored in New Brunswick the regional fair of the National Scholarship Services Fund for Negro Students. The Office also conducted telephone campaigns, organized a Community Advisory Board of minority educators and business and civic leaders, and--with the Office of Financial Aid--conducted workshops for parents of minority applicants.

With additional funding from the State, a major scholarship program was initiated and named after Rutgers' first Black graduate. The program offers academic merit scholarships of $4000 per year to high ability Black and Puerto Rican students. In terms of both funding and number of recipients, this is the largest scholarship program at the University.

College A offers a program bringing minority high school students and their counselors to the College for a day-long seminar on college survival and career opportunities. A second visit affords prospective students an informal experience with college students. College A also offers a six-week, tuition-free, residential summer program designed to give 30 or more high school juniors and seniors the opportunity to attend college,

develop academic skills, and increase exposure to career areas in science, environmental science, and agriculture.

College B conducts a "phonothon" to promote personal interest in the College among admitted students, disseminate information on academic opportunities and student affairs programs, and encourage students and their parents to visit the campus. The College also sponsors the Upward Bound/Talent Search Program, which prepares disadvantaged, predominantly minority students for college. At College C, currently enrolled students conduct phonothons, visit high schools, conduct campus tours, and host receptions and luncheons. The College also participates in a "pre-college consortium" of higher education institutions in the city, serving students in grades 8 and 9, where dropout rates peak, and offers review and preparation for SATs.

Strategies to Improve Retention

Many of the retention efforts centered around increased tutorial assistance and additional counseling, for which some new permanent state funds provided additional staff. College A, for example, developed the HELP program (high expectance/low performance) to provide counseling to those students whose characteristics were similar to those who, in previous cohorts, did not perform as well as expected given their admissions profiles. Of the 85 students who were interviewed under the initial program, 2% subsequently withdrew from the University, compared to a 13% withdrawal rate for the 106 students who were not interviewed. The College has also developed a support program for students on academic probation and a faculty/staff advisor training program. Finally, with funding from the New Jersey Department of Higher Education, the College has developed a

model project designed to improve performance in entry-level math and science courses.

The major effort of College B is concentrated on a Freshman Studies Program, in which students are placed in reading and writing courses at the appropriate level and in one of a selected number of regular freshman courses in the disciplines, which include recitation sections where attendance is required. A revised orientation program features an academic year peer-counseling module led by a trained upperclass student, an expanded schedule of informal workshops, advisement sessions, and a new non-credit "course" in study skills.

College C has expanded its advising system and improved student activities. New students meet frequently in support-group workshops during their first semester of college. The sessions are devoted to discussions of study skills, expectations, administrative and student life services, careers, and academic achievements. A newly-appointed Assistant Dean for Retention is developing academic retention programs for minority students, such as leadership training, academic seminars, and advisor workshops. Another new appointee, the Assistant Dean of Students for Minority Affairs, coordinates minority programs, activities, and student groups, emphasizing the improvement of collegiate non-classroom activities for students.

On the New Brunswick campus, the Special Project for Retention of Minorities in the Sciences may be the first step towards a reversal of the historical difficulties experienced by minorities in science curricula. Black and Hispanic students registered for General Chemistry and General Biology have been offered special academic advising. In addition, special receptions were held for these students and their parents, where they were

greeted by science faculty, deans, and undergraduate minority science majors. During the spring semester campus departments are reviewing the prospect of organizing special sections of lower level or "prep" courses, especially for remedial students.

Early Follow-up

It is possible at this point to see preliminary results of the University's stepped-up recruitment and retention efforts. Nevertheless, the true test of the success of the various strategies, and especially those dealing with retention, is whether minority enrollments continue to increase. Table 3 extends Table 1 to include admissions data for students entering in 1986. At Colleges A, B, and C (indeed, University-wide)

Insert Table 3 about here

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applications from Black students were higher for 1986 than for 1985. The percent admitted was also higher--in some cases, such as College A, substantially so--but, interestingly, there was little change in yield. Thus while the recruitment strategies were successful insofar as they contributed to increased applications from Black students, the goal of higher yield has not yet been achieved. The James Dickson Carr Scholarship Program has been enormously successful, however. The yield from among those applicants offered Carr Scholarships was 57%, and although the original goal was only 50 students, 81 Carr Scholars were ultimately enrolled.

Overall the resulting enrollment data are also encouraging. In fall 1986, minority students constituted more than 30% of the nearly 7200 full-time freshmen enrolled in the University. Among these nearly 12% were

Table 3: Trends in Applications, Admissions, and Enrollments 1980-1986, Black and Total

	BLACK					TOTAL				
	APPS	ADMIT		ENROLL		APPS	ADMIT		ENROLL	
	N	N	% [a]	N	% [b]	N	N	% [a]	N	% [b]
COLLEGE A										
1980	423	211	(50)	50	(24)	5473	2101	(38)	518	(25)
1981	464	266	(57)	62	(23)	6057	2740	(45)	592	(22)
1982	343	195	(57)	45	(23)	4704	2595	(55)	671	(26)
1983	347	209	(60)	39	(19)	4616	2351	(51)	478	(20)
1984	298	175	(59)	46	(26)	3996	2320	(58)	532	(23)
1985	246	146	(59)	28	(19)	3710	2210	(60)	539	(24)
1986	256	184	(72)	35	(19)	3637	2162	(59)	528	(24)
COLLEGE B										
1980	960	469	(49)	148	(32)	4326	2592	(60)	613	(24)
1981	970	528	(54)	157	(30)	4824	3136	(65)	829	(26)
1982	1007	505	(50)	130	(26)	6271	3400	(54)	733	(22)
1983	933	511	(55)	148	(29)	6985	3781	(54)	718	(19)
1984	987	463	(47)	129	(28)	7425	3927	(53)	655	(17)
1985	905	497	(55)	113	(23)	7193	4057	(56)	656	(16)
1986	967	604	(62)	146	(24)	7762	4383	(56)	750	(17)
COLLEGE C										
1980	691	223	(32)	106	(48)	3507	1755	(50)	716	(41)
1981	629	184	(29)	89	(48)	3211	1609	(50)	655	(41)
1982	513	169	(33)	81	(48)	2917	1513	(52)	614	(41)
1983	512	164	(32)	63	(38)	3149	1624	(52)	568	(35)
1984	508	188	(37)	98	(52)	3147	1705	(54)	758	(44)
1985	451	148	(33)	68	(46)	2987	1600	(54)	631	(39)
1986	514	180	(35)	78	(43)	3139	1534	(49)	603	(39)

(a) Number of admits divided by the number of applications.
(b) Number of enrolls divided by number of admits. Often referred to as admissions "yield."

Black, an increase of about 20% over the comparable proportion of a year earlier. In addition, the absolute number (as distinct from the relative proportion) of first-time full-time Black freshman increased by 26%.

Attrition and graduation rates also show signs of improvement. The total one-year attrition rate across all University day colleges was 1% lower for the 1985 cohort (and is now 12%) than for freshmen entering in 1984, but was 5% lower (now 15%) for Black freshmen. Total two-year attrition increased slightly, but was 4% lower for Blacks. The four-year graduation rate improved somewhat for students--total and Black--entering in 1982. Figure 3 extends Figure 1 to include the one-year attrition rate for the 1985 cohort at the three sample colleges. Black attrition declined by 3% at both Colleges A and C, but was 1% higher at College B. Only time will tell, however, whether the improvements evident in 1986 are more than temporary aberrations.

Insert Figure 3 about here

Recruitment and Retention Goals

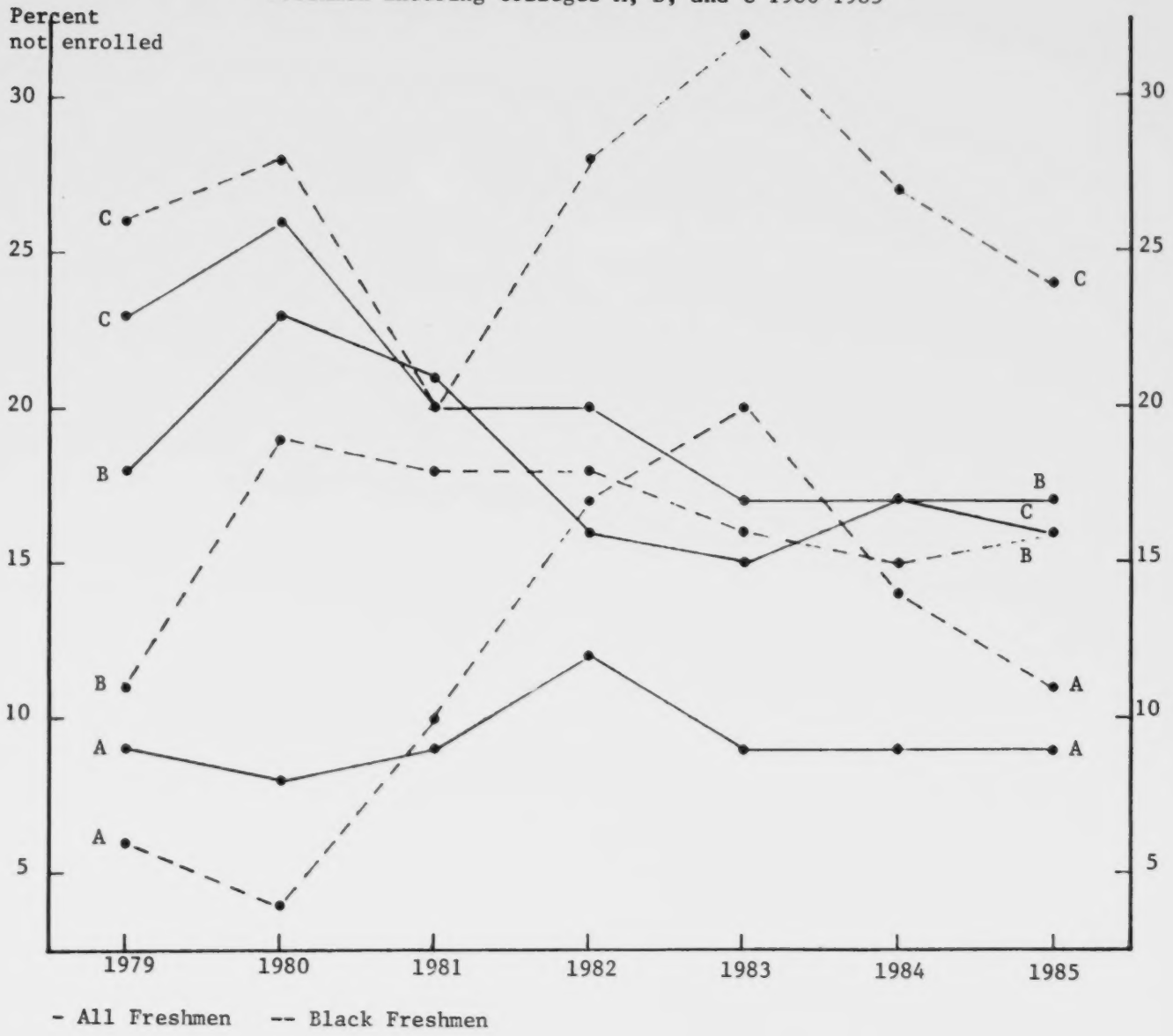
For the immediate future, Rutgers intends to continue its efforts to:

--Recruit, admit, and enroll minority students at least in approximation to their representation of the State's population.

--Increase the graduation rate of Black and Puerto Rican students to a level approximating that of other students with comparable admissions credentials.

--Increase the percentage of Black and Hispanic candidates in major disciplines, especially in the sciences, in which they are underrepresented.

Figure 3: One-year Attrition Rates, Total and Black Freshmen Entering Colleges A, B, and C 1980-1985



--Identify those "gateway" experiences which pose differential impediments to satisfactory academic progress for minority students, and devise effective remedial and/or compensatory academic experiences capable of eliminating such impediments.

--Evaluate current University policies on standards for academic progress.

--Render the social as well as the academic environment at the University genuinely hospitable to minority students.

Conclusion

A problem that has been developing for years cannot be solved overnight. While Rutgers has a long history of concern with the recruitment and retention of minority students, it has only been recently that the decline in minority enrollment, occurring through decreased applications and lower admissions yield, as well as through decreased retention, has become serious enough to galvanize the University community to action. Instructed by the President to improve retention by one-third within one year, the colleges put an immense effort into understanding the scope of the problem through analysis of admissions and enrollment trends, and developing plans to halt the decline. It is certainly too soon to conclude that the crisis has been averted, but preliminary comparisons of 1986 data with figures from earlier years suggest that Rutgers is definitely headed in the right direction.